



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

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OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

16 November 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: Major General Brent Scowcroft, USAF
Deputy Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

SUBJECT : Response to Dr. Kissinger's 15 November
Request

1. Attached is the Agency's response to the request
levied in paragraph 1 of Dr. Kissinger's 15 November cable
[redacted] Per our 15 November telephone
conversation, this is an Agency submission which has not
been discussed or coordinated with any other component of
the intelligence community.

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3. Dr. Kissinger's instructions regarding the next
SR-71 flight have been relayed.

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George A. Carver, Jr.
Deputy for National Intelligence Officers

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

16 November 1973

NORTH VIETNAMESE INFILTRATION,
STOCKPILING, AND CAPABILITIES FOR AN OFFENSIVE
DURING THE CURRENT DRY SEASONThe Key Points

- In manpower, logistical, and firepower terms, Communist forces pose a very formidable offensive threat in GVN MR 1 and MR 3. In MR 1 their position is stronger than it was in April 1972; in MR 3 it is as strong.
- While combat infiltration into South Vietnam thus far this dry season lags behind that of the two previous years, there is recent evidence that it may increase markedly in the near future. This would be necessary if the Communists are to sustain a major offensive.
- Logistically, the Communists are already in a very strong position in South Vietnam, with sufficient stocks to support heavy fighting for eight months.
- In Cambodia, the Khmer Communists have the capability (and are preparing) to launch a major offensive, but to sustain it through the dry season they will require increased logistical support from the North Vietnamese.

The DetailsNorth Vietnamese Personnel Infiltration to the South

1. The pace of combat infiltration into South Vietnam thus far this dry season lags behind that of the previous two years, though there is a recent indication that it may increase markedly in the near future. Last year's dry season infiltration served to rebuild North Vietnamese units which were seriously depleted in the 1972 offensive, and the previous year's infiltration was focused on preparations for the offensive. The objectives which Hanoi intends to pursue this year in its infiltration effort should become clear in the next several weeks.

2. [redacted] North Vietnam has sent about 26,500

troops to the southern war zones. [redacted]

[redacted] is some 10,000

less than that during the comparable period in 1971 -- when the Communists were preparing for their 1972 Spring Offensive -- and slightly less than last year.

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The Logistics System

4. The North Vietnamese are in a strong logistic position in South Vietnam. Although it is not possible to estimate with confidence the amount of supplies in storage throughout the country, we believe that they now have stocks of ordnance there and in adjacent base areas of North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia sufficient to sustain heavy combat activity for at least an entire dry season. POL and food supplies are more limited in South Vietnam but could be obtained from the rear base areas. Furthermore, the repeated identification by aerial photography of artillery, armor, and other military equipment along the overland supply corridor from China in recent months strongly suggests that Hanoi continues to receive military aid from its allies.

5. The North Vietnamese maintain sizable stocks of ordnance in North Vietnam readily available for shipment to the south -- this

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6. Operating in a bomb-free environment, the Communists now are in a much better position to move supplies into South Vietnam and Cambodia. They have substantially augmented their logistic forces in northern South Vietnam by the addition of some 15,000 personnel and have streamlined their logistic structure. They are also making major improvements on the Ho Chi Minh Trail -- their traditional corridor through Laos -- and have nearly completed a parallel road from North Vietnam through western South Vietnam as far south as MR-3. When completed, this western supply corridor will enable the Communists to move supplies into MRs 1 and 2 on a year-round basis.

Communist Capabilities by Area

South Vietnam

7. With respect to manpower, firepower and logistics, the Communist forces in South Vietnam pose the most formidable threat in MR-1 and MR-3. In these regions, there are more regular NVA combat forces than in April 1972 and they are supported by more firepower and a better logistic system. In MRs 2 and 4, however, VC/NVA forces are handicapped [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Within these two MRs, only in the western highlands of MR 2 do the Communists have the nucleus for a major sustained offensive action.

8. If Hanoi plans to launch a countrywide sustained offensive characterized by multiregimental attacks, additional infiltrators would be needed to build up understrength units in MRs 2 and 4 and establish a reserve pool of manpower for casualty replacement in MRs 2, 3, and 4.

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Military Region 1

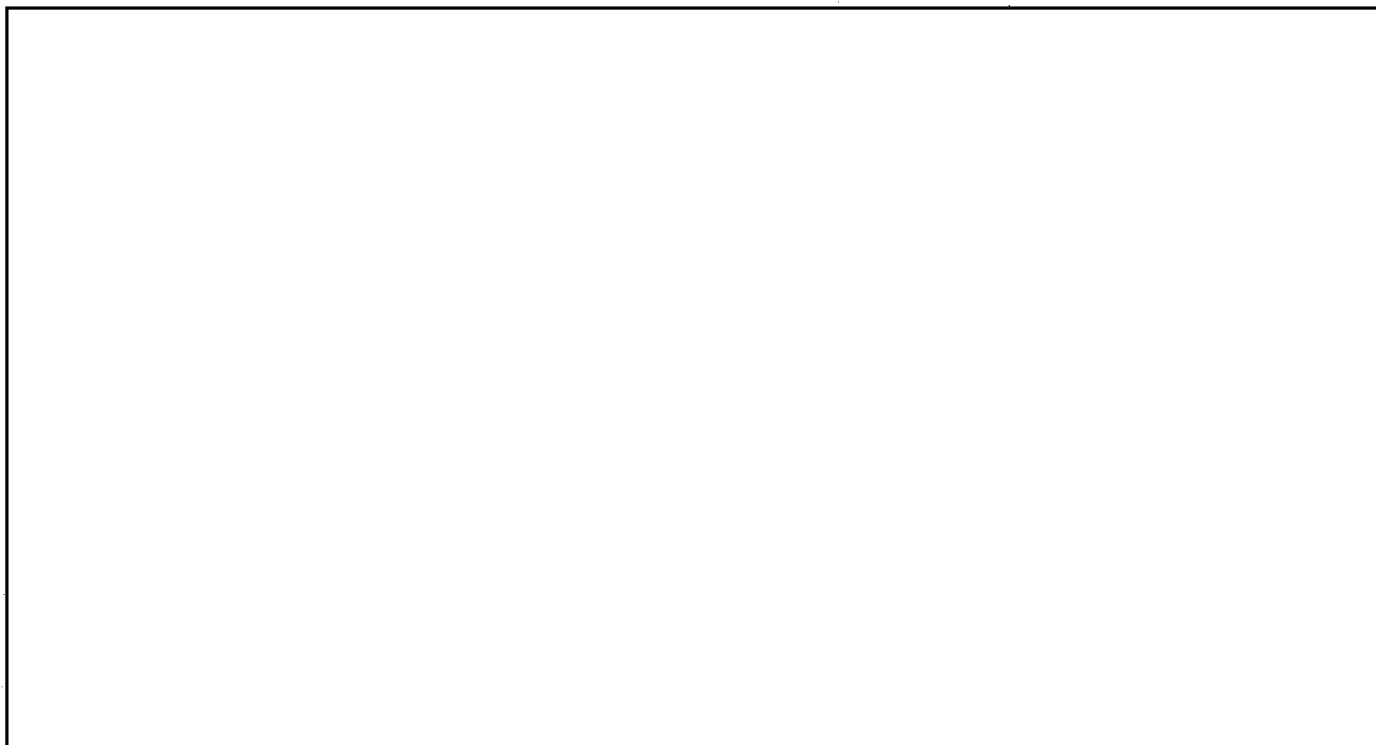
9. In both manpower and firepower terms, Communist forces in MR 1 are now stronger than they have ever been.

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Communist combat regiments -- infantry, armor, and artillery -- are now near peak strength levels, and North Vietnamese forces would require very little infiltration prior to launching an offensive. Moreover, the North Vietnamese have infiltrated sufficient quantities of armor, artillery, and air defense weapons to more than replace their 1972 losses. The Communists also have distributed their armor and long-range artillery more evenly throughout MR 1 than in 1972.



10. The tactical disposition of Communist combat forces also enhances their capability to mount major offensive activity. Unlike 1972, when North Vietnamese divisions were attacking from base areas in the DMZ area and southern Laos, the Communists now occupy most of the strategic high ground from just west of Quang Tri City to the area west of Da Nang. Thus, Communist forces could launch sustained, multi-regimental attacks against major GVN population centers in Quang Tri, Thua Thien, and Quang Nam Provinces with little warning.

11. Logistically, they are also in a very strong position. Large stockpiles of ammunition and POL are now on hand south of the DMZ and along the western border of the region

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Furthermore, many new, large storage areas have been established to accommodate the very high stock levels, enabling the Communists to rely more heavily on in-country stocks. Movement of supplies has been facilitated by last summer's important improvements to the road system, both along the western border and eastward into the coastal lowlands. In addition, the POL pipelines in Quang Tri and Thua Thien Provinces have been extended to insure the more rapid transport and distribution of fuel, and the airfield at Khe Sanh has been significantly improved.

Military Region 2

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12. Communist combat capabilities in MR 2 currently are substantially less than in MR 1. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Additional deployments of artillery and armor to MR 2 during the last dry season -- while achieving overall parity in numbers -- have not offset this shortfall in regular combat regiments. Thus, a commitment of about 15,000 infiltrators would be required to upgrade combat unit

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strengths and build a reserve manpower pool to replace casualties during a major offensive.

13. The Communists are logistically capable of launching sustained offensive activity in the highlands of western MR 2. Although the supply flow to this area during the past several months has been light, the Communists moved large quantities of ordnance into this area last dry season

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Some stockpiles of food apparently are also available. As in MR 1, the movement of supplies in this section has been facilitated by the new road construction along the western supply corridor.

14. In coastal MR 2, the NVA's logistic position is less favorable. The lack of cross-border roads from the western supply corridor into the coastal lowlands would make resupply of this area during a major offensive more difficult. This problem would be alleviated, however, if the Communists extend the cross-country road -- which now terminates in Quang Ngai Province -- into Binh Dinh Province in MR 2. (They are now working on this road.)

Military Region 3

15. Communist combat forces in MR 3 pose a formidable offensive threat,

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[redacted] infiltration of armor, artillery, and air defense weaponry during the 1972-73 dry season has provided the Communists with more firepower than ever before. For example, the Communists in 1973 have moved more heavy artillery weapons -- including 122mm and 130mm field guns -- into MR 3 than they had at the height of the 1972 offensive. [redacted]

[redacted]

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16. The bulk of the Communist combat force structure is now closer to the populated areas northwest of Saigon than in April 1972, when they initiated their attacks from the Cambodia border area. This would make it easier for VC/NVA main force combat units to engage GVN forces protecting the approaches to Saigon in northwest MR 3.

17. The logistic situation poses little constraint to Communist offensive activity in MR 3. The Communists have taken advantage of secure cross-border routes from Cambodia to truck supplies regularly into the northern provinces of MR 3 and build large stockpiles. Roads and storage facilities have been built or improved to within 30 miles north of Saigon, and in the event of heavy fighting, this would provide the Communists with shorter

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supply lines and greater mobility than ever before. Additionally, Communist command and logistic units are now closer to the tactical forces,

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Military Region 4

19. Communist capabilities are less in MR 4 than in any of the other military regions.

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There has been no improve-

ment in the VC/NVA firepower position in the past year.

20. Logistically, while able to support a sharp increase in the level of tactical activity in MR 4, the Communists could not prolong heavy combat without encountering serious resupply difficulties in all areas except those immediately adjacent to Cambodia. The Communists do maintain sizable stockpiles along the Cambodian border opposite MR 4,

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[REDACTED]

the Delta. Unlike other regions, the Communists in MR 4 have not improved their transportation system and continue to rely heavily upon traditional means, such as sampans and portering. They consequently experience much greater difficulty in building forward stockpiles and moving large quantities of supplies. The Communist supply lines into the Delta are also vulnerable to ARVN interdictions, which, in the past, has hurt them critically during periods of heavy fighting.

Cambodia

21. Khmer Communist (KC) combat strength is currently estimated at 44,000 to 54,000 men, only about a third of that of FANK.* With this force, however, the KC have maintained the initiative in Cambodia, and have brought the war close to Phnom Penh. Along with the expansion and improvement which underly the KC successes of 1973, however, have come problems, and these are likely to affect KC capabilities during the coming dry season.

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Despite these problems, the KC have the capability to launch major offensive actions against key lines of communication and cities during

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the coming dry season, and they will benefit from the absence of U.S. air support. Their ability to sustain an offensive through the dry season will depend largely on the level of resupply from the North Vietnamese.

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